

Socialist Congo Prospers Through Mix of Capitalism and Oil

By Leon Dash

BRAZZAVILLE, Congo—When American oilman L. Scotty Greenwald talks about his Marxist hosts, he makes this languid river-port capital sound like Abidjan, the busy investment haven of the Ivory Coast.

"They welcome the American technological skills and we've had nothing but excellent cooperation from the Congolese," said Greenwald, the director of the Cities Service Co.'s new operations here. "In less than six months, we've opened two offices."

What Greenwald implied is that this communist country does not fit any easy Third World socialist stereotype. American and European businessmen can do as well with the Congo's pragmatic government, he said, as they have done with Angola's, this country's Marxist neighbor to the south.

Cities Service just recently anchored an oil-drilling platform offshore, becoming the first American company to take part in the Congo's oil boom. The Congolese government wants to diversify the oil interests it deals with so as not to be too dependent on the French and Italian companies now producing here.

Last year American scientists led two expeditions into the Congo jungle looking for remnants of a water-dwelling dinosaur called *mokele-mbembe*, an elephant-sized creature extinct for 60 million years. Neither expedition found a trace of the legendary beast, but a Congolese rock band produced a song and created a *mokele-mbembe* dance to honor the efforts. Like the expeditions, the song and dance were flops.

Apart from such light moments, Brazzaville gives an impression of stern, revolutionary Marxism. Amid the tropical greenery of the city's streets are the usual larger-than-life portraits of Marx and Lenin. Everywhere are billboards with such messages as "Seven hours of work and not seven hours at work" and "Be revolutionary to assure the primacy of the general interest above individual interest."

While the domestic scene is calm today, the Congo's road to socialism has had its rocky moments. Several years ago, ideological purists in the government reportedly brought the country to the brink of economic disaster by trying to pull the Congo out of the French-run monetary union. The convertibility of the Congo's franc, like currencies

of most French-speaking African nations, is guaranteed by the French treasury.

A trade union upheaval, an Army coup, an assassination and a political party coup have toppled four Congolese governments since the country won independence from France in 1960. The present head of state, *clapnet* Army Col. Denis Sassou-n'Guesso, 39, maintains a delicate political balance among the groups—the Army, the trade unions, and intellectual Marxist civilians. But his government could be overthrown as well.

Yet the Congo is not easy to compare to Africa's other socialist countries. Sixty percent of the economy is dominated by flourishing French-owned private commercial and manufacturing interests. The rest of the economy is tied to more than a hundred state-owned businesses. A majority of them are money losers and are a serious drain on the Congolese treasury.

Rising revenues from a four-year, 113 percent jump in oil exports—now about 110,000 barrels a day—are financing a skyscraper building spree in Brazzaville and have led to the commercial rebirth of Pointe Noire, the Congo's Atlantic Ocean port. Per capita income of the 1.5 million people is an astronomical \$1,000 a year, by African standards. The government has begun pouring millions of dollars in oil earnings into road building and agricultural development in the Congo's largely untouched forested interior. Last year, civil servants received a 13 percent salary increase, the first in years.

French journalists, who keep a close watch on events here, have labeled the Congolese leadership "Marxist-capitalist," riding a wave of oil-generated prosperity. The Congo enjoys a special place in French nostalgia, because Brazzaville was Charles de Gaulle's headquarters for a time during World War II. It was at Brazzaville that de Gaulle made a speech in 1944 promising to reform France's colonial policies.

Congolese government spokesman Emmanuel Adzou chuckled at the "Marxist-capitalist" label.

"We are not turning toward the road to capitalism," he said. "It has been necessary for us to make a slow transition to socialism because we lack the cadres to accomplish this goal rapidly. We do not want to disrupt the economy overnight."

Jack Anderson

In Liberia, Quiet Diplomacy

At a time when military eruptions around the world seem to make U.S. foreign policy a helpless tail on the kite of events, it is reassuring to report a small but important triumph for the Reagan administration.

The scene of this victory, achieved by patient, behind-the-scenes diplomacy against the machination of the Soviets and Libyans, is Liberia, the oldest republic in Africa. Though small by African standards—about the size of Pennsylvania with a population no bigger than Philadelphia's—Liberia is strategically situated on the hump of Africa and had been our staunchest ally on the continent for more than a century.

So there was unalloyed dismay in Washington in April 1980, when a bloody coup led by noncommissioned officers overthrew the pro-American oligarchy. President William Tolbert was assassinated in his bed. Ten days later, as news photographers recorded the grim scene, 11 wealthy officials were tied to stakes on the beach and executed. The U.S.-style constitution was suspended as a junta of sergeants took control.

It looked as if the United States, embarrassed by the failure of the hostage rescue attempt in Iran at about the same time, was about to suffer another humiliation. There were ominous warnings that the Liberian populace, embittered by years of exploitation by the corrupt ruling families, would turn its back on the United States and embrace the Soviet bloc.

And indeed, the Soviets made their move to replace the United States in Liberian affections. An internal Senate Foreign Relations Committee report, shown to my associate, Dale Var Atta, describes the dicey situation in the spring and summer of 1980:

"The Soviets and the Libyans—especially in the early months following the coup—saw fertile ground in Liberia. The Soviets, directly and through their Cuban and Ethiopian surrogates, attempted to establish a relationship with the Liberians, primarily in the area of military assistance."

Libyan and Liberian officials exchanged visits, and a Libyan "People's Bureau" was opened in Monrovia. The coup leader and new president, Master Sgt. Samuel K. Doe, appeared to be ripe for plucking by the Kremlin or Libyan wildman Muammar Qaddafi.

Instead of throwing up their hands in despair or trying to counter the Soviet move with military bombast, U.S. diplomats went quietly to work in Washington and Monrovia.

There was a deliberate, low-key effort to reassure Doe and his supporters of our good intentions.

Continued on Pg. 17